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Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

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Wednesday, 27 September 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Alemu	(Ethiopia)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/794)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/794)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/794, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: I am delighted to see you, Mr. President, presiding over this meeting. I am lucky enough be in the Council in person and not via video-teleconference, owing to the overlap with the recent General Assembly meetings.

Let me update the Council first on the most recent developments, which I am supposed to do, and then move on to the way ahead on the political track and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). First, with regard to what is happening on the ground, the Amman discussions and the meetings that have taken place very effectively in Astana have created four zones of de-escalation: in the south, in eastern Ghouta, north of Homs, and Idlib province. We also now have two other so-called deconfliction zones, which are being brokered by the Russian Federation in Afrin and eastern Qalamun.

However, the situation remains fragile because we are concerned by the Al-Nusra offensive in Idlib and Hama provinces following the Astana meeting and the heavy fighting that has been taking place there. This includes also, for the first time since April, some air strikes, some of which allegedly hit civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities, as well as heavy opposition shelling on civilian towns and the Government controlling Hama and Latakia. We are also concerned at heavy fighting in other places too. So the situation is far from perfect. Nevertheless, we have to admit and we want to reaffirm in this Chamber that the creation of the de-escalation zones is a very important step in the effort to de-escalate the violence throughout the country. We are seeing the results of it.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is being beaten back. Government forces have advanced in the eastern countryside of Hama and Homs and broken the so-called three-year siege, which has been taking place de facto around Deir ez-Zor city. The Government and allies also recently crossed the Euphrates river. Meanwhile, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with the backing of the International Coalition, have made further advances against ISIL, taking control of most of the city of Raqqa, while the SDF-led Deir ez-Zor military council has made advances against ISIL on the eastern banks of the Euphrates. The Government and its allies have reportedly increased their strikes on SDF positions. Armed opposition groups are also involved in battle against ISIL in Dar'a. I wish to recall the United Nations calls for the protection of civilians — and this is the right place to do it — in Idlib, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and elsewhere where fighting is still going on.

In the midst of this intensive military activity, while we all recognize that the fighting against ISIL is crucial, we need to remember that civilians cannot be punished twice. They have already been punished because they have been under the rule of ISIL and, if they happen to be unlucky enough to be there when the fighting is taking place, they are punished a second time. More needs to be done in the field of the protection of civilians. More needs to be done to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure from military assault and to ensure safe, sustained and unimpeded access to all civilians in need in Syria, wherever they are. I am sure the Council will hear more on that point from my colleague and friend Mark Lowcock.

Allow me nevertheless to specifically underline the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons.

Thousands of them, according to their own families, are still missing, abducted or detained. We have not seen any progress on this issue — neither in Astana, despite several attempts to do so, nor in Geneva. A very large number of Syrian families are suffering from the absence of their own detained or missing relatives and lack, above all, information on their fate. They do not even know if they are alive or not. The time has come to address this issue now as a major priority, particularly in this case when we see a de-escalation taking place.

I also hope that concrete results can be achieved in the near future on the issue of humanitarian mine action. I hate mines. I have had three of my colleagues killed by mines in Afghanistan and Iraq. I have seen mines in action. This would constitute another important confidence-building measure. I note with interest the ongoing dialogue between the United Nations Mine Action Service and the Government of Syria in this regard.

There is a wide consensus that de-escalation arrangements must not lead to a soft partition of Syria, and that Syria's unity and territorial integrity must be fully upheld. I have found many common perspectives through the hundreds of Syrians we are meeting regularly. Syrians of all backgrounds have voiced their own strong rejection of any partitioning of Syria — its territory and its people.

That is why de-escalation should be basically a precursor to a truly nationwide ceasefire and to action on the humanitarian and confidence-building fronts — issues which are covered in paragraphs 12 to 14 of resolution 2254 (2015). The Astana effort and the effort in Amman should be seen as laying the basis for a renewed Geneva process — one that moves from preparatory talks to genuine negotiations on the political future of Syria, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015), tackling all four baskets of the agenda, and as welcomed by the Council.

I have engaged both sides, as well as all those who have influence on them, during the opening of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, which has been as usual very useful. I have attended a number of multilateral meetings in its margins, including one convened by the European Union — and I want to thank the European Union for that initiative — with a wide cross section of international actors. I also had the opportunity to visit Washington, D.C., on Monday, while my Deputy, Ambassador Ramzy, visited Moscow yesterday and is still there today. I intend to maintain a high level of engagement with all concerned countries and Syrian parties in the weeks ahead.

We will continue to engage with all participants in the Civil Society Support Room and to draw on the insights of the Women's Advisory Board. Participants from both have strongly underscored to me the expectations of a broad cross section of Syrians for an inclusive political solution reflecting the interests of all Syrians and grounded in human rights, equality and justice. They continue to call attention to the voices missing from the political process, including women who are half of the population, if not more. They should have an equal voice in the decisions shaping the future of their own country.

I wish to confirm today my intention to convene the eighth round of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which I discussed yesterday with the Secretary-General, about a month from now. The precise date is to be determined. It should not be any later than the end of October or early November. I am reaffirming this time frame in order to allow all concerned to use the crucial month from now until then to create conditions for those talks to be meaningful. And I am calling on both sides — both sides — to assess the situation with realism and responsibility towards the people of Syria and to seriously prepare for participation in the Geneva talks without preconditions. I would like to explain exactly what we may mean by that.

First, I believe hat the Government has an interest in and indeed a duty now to genuinely negotiate with an opposition that the Council identified by name in resolution 2254 (2015). Until now, the Government has conditioned its readiness to move from talks to real negotiations on the issue of opposition unity and a commitment to certain essential principles. I also know how important the issue of counter-terrorism is for the Government. But it is precisely at this time, as terrorism is starting to be defeated in Syria — and we are watching it with our own eyes — that we need to preserve those gains on the ground and sustain them through a real and inclusive political process, guided by resolution 2254 (2015).

The Government should therefore be urged to show by word and action that it genuinely wants to have negotiations on key issues — credible, inclusive governance, locally and centrally; a schedule and process for creating a new constitution; and United

Nations-supervised elections — while the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria is reaffirmed and while terrorism is being combatted and defeated. It is important that those States that are friends of the Syrian Government encourage it to show its readiness to move forward, including on the substance of resolution 2254 (2015), the agenda of the baskets, not just in broad terms but in specifics, with details, sequencing and implementation modalities. We know that this will not be easy, but the process has to be started, and the United Nations will be more than willing to be a broker in enabling real negotiations with the opposition.

For its part, the opposition, we believe, also has an interest in and a duty now to signal that it does want to speak with one voice and with a common platform in genuine negotiations with the Government on the four baskets and on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). No one is asking the opposition to suddenly stop being the opposition, but we are urging the opposition to realize that it is most credible and effective when it stands together and shows readiness to negotiate, which means give and take.

In that regard, there has frankly been a lot of hard work up until now in our Office. We facilitated valuable technical work on the three opposition platforms from May to July. The opposition should be urged now to take the opportunity presented by the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to convene what they call an inclusive Riyadh 2 conference, which we hope and trust will take place in October, before the Geneva talks and before Astana. That conference should be the time and place for the opposition, with the encouragement of those who have influence over it — some of whom are in the Chamber — to ensure that it comes together and presents a strategic approach to the negotiation process towards realizing the vision, which remains the same, contained in resolution 2254 (2015). The United Nations is ready to support this vision and approach in any way it can.

I would like to caution all sides against illusions of victory or dreams of shortcuts. There is no substitute for an United Nations, internationally supported process based in Geneva on a comprehensive and inclusive approach that also helps Syrians to rediscover a modicum of trust and social cohesion after this bitter conflict. We need to remember that hundreds of thousands are dead and that millions carry the physical or psychological wounds of a brutal conflict. Millions have been displaced, either within Syria or beyond, even as some — and we are glad to see this — are trying to return home. Thousands have been detained, thousands have disappeared — many without a trace, and with no progress on the revelation of their fate.

Infrastructure, particularly civilian infrastructure, has been destroyed on an unimaginable scale, and internationally proscribed terrorists groups, even if they are on the back foot today — and they are — have shown their resilience in other places of the world in surviving battlefield reverses and thriving again — which they will or could — if there is no new political compact that enables society to make the transition towards a shared, inclusive and democratic future. The need to address the unmet grievances that exist in Syria is apparent to me from the range of Syrian voices who are aligned neither with Government nor with the opposition but who say that they do have grievances.

That is why the time has come for the focus to return to Geneva, and for the intra-Syrian talks to take place under the auspices of the United Nations, specifically the Security Council. This is the only forum in which the transitional political process envisaged by the Council in resolution 2254 (2015) can be developed with the Syrian parties themselves, with the full legitimacy, which is what the United Nations provides, and the backing of the international community. We have a month until those talks, and we want everyone to work during that month. Let us use it to prepare well for the upcoming talks.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: Mr. President, it is an honour to speak to you this afternoon for the first time since taking up my role as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

All Council members around this table are aware of the devastating effects the conflict has had on civilians in Syria. I recognize the strenuous efforts many members have made to promote improvements in the humanitarian situation. I know that the Council has worked collectively for increased humanitarian access and for the protection of civilians, and this remains high on the agenda of the international community, as we saw at the general debate in the General Assembly last week. Humanitarian and protection needs remain both vast and acute across Syria. I pledge to work with

the Security Council and with all sides to improve protection and to get aid to people in need.

I welcome the continued progress in de-escalation following the 4 May agreement signed by Russia, Turkey and Iran. These developments have had a positive impact on civilians in certain parts of south-western Syria, rural Damascus, north-western Homs and Idlib. As my colleague, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, has said, the last round of talks in Astana have set the stage for a further reduction in violence. Nevertheless, we continue to receive reports of violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, and like Staffan, I am concerned about reports of recent fighting and air strikes in Idlib and Hama, which have resulted in significant death and injury and damaged critical civilian infrastructure.

Reports suggest that an air strike yesterday in the Wadi Al-Zaib area yesterday in rural Hama may have killed as many as 80 people fleeing the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). I am particularly concerned about air strikes reportedly hitting schools and hospitals in Idlib. Humanitarian partners told us last week that three hospitals in Kafr Nabl, Khan Shaykhun, and Heish sub-districts are no longer in service, leaving over half a million people without access to medical care. Such attacks result not only in direct human suffering from the attacks themselves, but they also cause unnecessary consequential suffering and death by depriving people of access to medical care for what would otherwise be treatable conditions.

Further to the east, battles against ISIL in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates have resulted in a spike in violence. As the Syrian Democratic Forces continue their advances inside Raqqa city, I am concerned about the estimated 14,000 civilians trapped there. They are squeezed into an ever-smaller area. Civilians need safe passage and access to life-saving assistance. In Deir ez-Zor governorate, air strikes in recent days have reportedly led to the death of scores of civilians, while ISIL is reportedly using civilians as human shields. Nearly 100,000 people from towns in the governorate along the Euphrates have reportedly been displaced owing to the intense fighting since 25 August. More than 50,000 have been displaced in the past week alone. Many have been forced into other ISIL areas, out of the reach of relief organizations, and those who have been able to escape from fighting in those cities, by going north into Kurdish-controlled areas, continue to face restrictions on movement.

As front lines continue to shift, humanitarian access to those in need is also changing. After three years of besiegement by ISIL, as Staffan de Mistura just said, Government of Syria forces in early September gained access to Deir ez-Zor city. New commercial and humanitarian routes have been opened as a result. The United Nations, through our partner the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has been able to reach the area by road, and that means that we were able to end the airdrops which, through 309 high-altitude rotations since April last year, dispatched more than 6,030 metric tons of food and supplies to those in need inside the city.

Following a comprehensive review by the United Nations, Deir ez-Zor and the 93,500 people in the city are being removed from the list of those besieged. Some 419,920 people, most of whom, according to UNICEF, are children, now remain besieged in 10 locations across Syria. Of those, 95 per cent are besieged by the Government of Syria; 2 per cent in Fo'ah and Kafraya are besieged by non-State armed groups; and 3 per cent in Yarmouk are besieged by both non-State armed groups and the Government of Syria. While the numbers have been reduced, the plight of those trapped remains severe. Those sieges must be lifted.

More than 1 million people rely on assistance that is provided across conflict lines. We are still unable to reach the vast majority of them on a sufficiently regular basis. As of September, 9,000 people in the three besieged towns of Fo'ah, Kafraya and Yarmouk have been reached, and 25,000 people have been reached in eastern Harasta, Misraba and Modira, but overall, under the August and September access plan, we have reached just 280,500 of the 1.23 million people for whom we have requested assistance.

There have been periods over the past 18 months during which the United Nations has reached more than 300,000 people in a single week. I would like to see such access replicated or surpassed in the future. That will require overcoming constraints posed by bureaucratic delays and blockages by all sides. I note that the first two meetings of the tripartite mechanism comprised of the United Nations, the Government of Syria and the Russian Federation have taken place in Damascus to provide a forum for administrative and security issues. Those are practical developments that can improve the lives of Syrians. Regular programming within Syria allows millions of people to be reached every month through the most direct routes. Inside Syria, regular

programming reaches more than 4 million people each month with food, medicine and other essential items.

Through cross-border programming from Jordan and Turkey, we reach millions more. Since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2004), the United Nations has dispatched more than 16,000 trucks delivering health supplies sufficient for almost 15 million treatments, as well as non-food items for almost four million people and water, sanitation and hygiene support for three million people. Nearly 1 million people per month on average have been given help with food. As the Secretary-General says in his latest monthly report (S/2017/794), those operations complement the critical role played by international and Syrian non-governmental organizations. In addition to providing aid, those organizations provide essential basic services, including education and health.

The situation remains perilous for humanitarian workers in Syria, whether they are United Nations staff or our non-governmental organization partners who face risks of violence every day. As reported by the Secretary-General in his latest monthly report, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed since the beginning of the conflict, including staff members of the United Nations and staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Palestine Red Crescent Society. More than 50 staff members of the United Nations and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East remain detained or missing. International humanitarian law and human rights law set out the responsibilities of warring parties to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian organizations, including personnel, facilities and other relief assets. I count on the Council's vigilance and support to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian workers in Syria.

At the Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region held in April some $6 billion was pledged by more than 40 Governments to meet the humanitarian and longer-term needs of Syrians and host communities inside Syria and in the region, but the 2017 United Nations humanitarian response plan remains substantially underfunded. I call on the Council to renew its support for addressing that issue and for ensuring that all pledges be turned into contributions. I have sought the agreement of the authorities to visit Syria so as to see the situation for myself, support the preparation of the 2018 humanitarian response plan and subsequently advocate for resources for it.

Syria continues to face deep and difficult challenges, and the Syrian people remain trapped in a cycle of violence that must be broken. I will be working openly and transparently with all sides to find solutions that place the people at the centre of our collective focus. I look forward to working with the Council to get more help to them and provide them with better protection.

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Security Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We express our gratitude to Special Envoy De Mistura and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock for their comprehensive briefings. It is a pleasure to see Mr. De Mistura here again. We welcome Mr. Lowcock on the Security Council for the first time. We wish him success in carrying out his mandate, which has a great impact on millions of people throughout the world.

We regularly told his predecessor, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, that he had the difficult task before him of briefing us on painful situations and assessing their impact on this crisis. He also frankly communicated with us the human and humanitarian repercussions of the various crises and armed conflicts in which those among the civilian population are always the primary victims. In that context, in many cases the persevering, self-sacrificing and courageous work of the thousands of humanitarian workers of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and that of their local partners represent the difference between life and death for civilians trapped by those conflicts, in particular for the most vulnerable groups within the population, such as women and children.

Over the past two years as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, our delegation has often taken the floor in these open meetings because it believes that they offer us elected members the opportunity to report to our electors among the membership the position and opinions of our Government concerning the various issues before the Council. As this is Mr. Lowcock's first time on the Council, we want him to know first hand, at the very least, my Government's views.

Over the past two years, the main focus of Uruguay's work has centred on all that relates to the protection of civilians and international humanitarian

law, and we have continuously advocated that there be no restrictions on the access and the distribution of aid throughout the Syrian territory, including besieged and difficult-to-access areas. We have also continuously requested the protection and security of humanitarian workers carrying out their tasks. Given that there is now a new head of OCHA, we reiterate that extending an invitation to Mr. Lowcock to visit the country would be a very positive gesture on the part of the Government of Syria. It would allow for a smoother relationship with the United Nations to facilitate the normal delivery of humanitarian aid.

I must underscore that the Astana process and other regional initiatives launched in the past few months to end local hostilities have led to a considerable reduction in the level of fighting in the country, through the implementation of various de-escalation zones. We stress that it is imperative that those zones be temporary so as to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

For the fifth consecutive month, we must voice our concern about the fact that we have yet to receive any information on the implementation of the 4 May Astana memorandum. Despite the considerable progress made, it is essential to ensure the unhindered access of the United Nations and of humanitarian aid to those zones, and that people are free to enter and leave those areas at will. That would provide some guarantee that the basic principles of international humanitarian law are being respected.

We welcome the fact that following the previous meeting of the Astana process, the three guarantor countries issued a joint communiqué in which they underscored the need to make use of the de-escalation zones that were established in May to allow for swift, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. Similarly, it is encouraging that it also mentions the need for the parties to the conflict to develop confidence-building measures, including by releasing those who have been arrested or kidnapped, handing over remains and identifying missing persons, so as to create conditions that are more conducive to a successful political process and a lasting ceasefire.

With regard to humanitarian access, we are troubled that we continue to fall far short of meeting OCHA's requirements. We all on countries with influence on the Syrian Government, and in particular the Syrian Government itself, to ensure the smooth, safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. To that end, Syria must ensure the full implementation of OCHA's bi-monthly plans, by issuing all of the permits required. The Syrian Government is primarily responsible for making sure that its own population has access to food, water, medicines and supplies until the conflict ends.

Dispensing justice for the hundreds of thousands of innocent victims of the conflict will be crucial for achieving lasting peace in Syria and for ensuring that the entire population can move past the mistakes made during this protracted war. It will also create a compelling future and prevent the perpetrators of serious crimes committed during the past seven years from going unpunished.

In December last year, Uruguay supported the establishment of an impartial and independent international mechanism to assist with the investigation and trials of those responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic from March 2011, including those deemed to be war crimes, such as the use of chemical weapons against civilians. In that regard, we support the request made by Secretary-General António Guterres for crimes committed in Syria to be referred to and tried by the International Criminal Court.

Next month, the Joint Investigative Mechanism will release the findings of its analysis of two incidents, in which the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons confirmed the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is up to the Council to determine the measures to be taken to punish those found responsible. If not, the Council risks losing the little credibility it has retained after its management of the Syrian crisis.

Priorities in Syria have been clearly defined: find a political solution to end the war; engage in a peaceful political transition, consolidate local ceasefires and ensure humanitarian access to the millions in need in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We too wish to speak in this open meeting, and not just to share our opinion on the current situation in Syria with the members of the Security Council.

We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. We wish Mr. Lowcock every success on the Syrian humanitarian track. We trust that he will address the situation impartially and earn the trust of the parties.

On 14 and 15 September, the sixth international meeting on Syria was held in Astana. It was yet another genuine step taken by Russia, Iran and Turkey to strengthen the cessation-of-hostilities regime and to stabilize the overall situation in Syria. Parameters for all four de-escalation zones have been outlined. The calm in south-western Syria is maintained through constructive cooperation with the United States and Jordan. The level of violence continues to drop. We continue to underscore the temporary nature of the de-escalation zones. It is unacceptable to speculate that such zones are a veiled attempt to divide Syria into spheres of influence. We view those allegations as an effort to discredit the Astana process.

The territory under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is dwindling. The Russian air force continues to provide support to the Syrian Government to combat that threat. Following its besiegement by rebels for many years, the siege of Deir ez-Zor has been lifted. However, we see attempts to hamper action to prosecute fighters and drive them out of the city. That is at odds with the stated goal to fully vanquish the scourge of ISIL on Syrian soil. Once again, we caution that terrorists should not be given the opportunity to gain the upper hand. Only through frank cooperation, without hidden agendas, will it be possible to eradicate terrorist hotbeds.

That, by the way, also pertains to countering Jabhat Al-Nusra and its clones. Recently, the members of Al-Nusra took action to undermine the establishment of the de-escalation zones in Idlib and to prevent Government troops from conducting an offensive in Deir ez-Zor. In such conditions, it will therefore be impossible to set up observation points and checkpoints in the Idlib zone before driving out the main Al-Nusra forces. That challenge is currently being addressed effectively. We note media reports that one hospital after another in Idlib is being bombed. Such false information from militants and their sponsors is a well-known tactic used in the Syrian conflict.

The Astana process — a platform that was graciously provided by Kazakhstan — has breathed new life into intra-Syrian talks, under the auspices of the United Nations. We see that it has provided the momentum for the Geneva process, under Staffan de Mistura's stewardship. We look forward to the onset of direct talks between the parties. Much will depend on the opposition's ability to unite, eschew radical positions and finally begin constructive dialogue. Our partners in Saudi Arabia and Egypt have undertaken to facilitate that far from easy task, and we sincerely wish them success. We hope the next round of Geneva peace talks, to be held at the end of October, will succeed.

During the dialogues in Astana, the guarantor countries have not lost sight of the issues of safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, mine clearance and so forth. The agenda also includes topics such as the release of people who have been detained or abducted, proposing reciprocal steps for all the parties involved in the conflict.

We reiterate once again that it will be impossible to achieve effective solutions without involving the Government of Syria in the discussion. Unfortunately, no Syrian representatives were invited to the Syria event organized by the European Union during the General Assembly high-level week. An important step has been taken by establishing a tripartite mechanism involving Russia, Syria and the United Nations, and we hope that it will enable us to find solutions to the many complex issues related to humanitarian activities. For example, we are expecting the process for granting convoys permits to be shortened to two to three days. However, we repeat that transborder supplies will have to be gradually rolled back as humanitarian access expands. We should emphasize once again that we cannot ascribe all the problems related to humanitarian access to the lack of harmonization procedures. Decisions about timing and routes have to be made, and the security situation taken into account, in each specific case. We are aware of instances in which humanitarian convoys have been threatened precisely because of errors in their arrangements.

We cannot countenance risking the lives of humanitarian workers, and we firmly believe that the United Nations should rule out the possibility of sending convoys to regions that are occupied by terrorists, such as Jobar, in the capital, and Idlib. In that regard, it is difficult to understand the recent border crossing by humanitarian convoys through the Bab Al-Hawa checkpoint, which is under Al-Nusra control.

Another long-standing problem is the fair distribution of humanitarian aid. We know for certain that it often ends up in the hands of local warlords, is resold on the black market and used as a currency for purchasing the loyalty of local residents. We know that representatives of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have received threats and warnings about interfering

in distribution issues. Unfortunately, United Nations representatives often have no idea of whose hands their humanitarian aid is ending up in, and that is unacceptable.

We also know for certain that the need for humanitarian assistance is often calculated incorrectly and is sometimes overestimated when territories controlled by the opposition or terrorists are at issue. That is why we should ensure that local national reconciliation committees play a major role in determining the population's real needs. They are present in every de-escalation zone and include representatives of the Government and armed opposition's local authorities and respected civilians such as clerics, engineers and teachers. Russian officers also participate in the committees as observers. We are ready to organize the engagement of United Nations representatives with the committees to ensure that humanitarian operations can be better planned. Any establishment of parallel authorities in areas under terrorist control would be unacceptable.

The potential of these committees could also be used to enable exchanges of detainees and prisoners. Around 100 people from both the Government and the opposition have already been freed in the southern de-escalation zone. The local national reconciliation committees are currently improving their coordination, and plans are in the works to convene a Syrian peoples' congress, which could play an important role in the Geneva negotiation process alongside the united opposition platform.

In a situation that is being stabilized in many parts of Syria, accompanied by individuals returning on a massive scale, the scope of external humanitarian efforts must be stepped up. What is wanted now is speedy organization to bring in the materials, technology and equipment needed to rebuild the country and restore civilian life. Syrians must be given a sense that peace is coming. We urge the United Nations to increase humanitarian assistance throughout Syria without any slowdown induced by listening to the arguments of those who are trying to exploit the issue of humanitarian aid in order to achieve a political settlement on their own terms. It is a fact that some capitals continue to tie humanitarian assistance, including mine clearance, to progress with the political transition, and we know perfectly well that there is pressure on the United Nations and its entities not to move too hastily to begin reconstruction efforts. On top of that, Syrians are still being targeted with unilateral sanctions, and such collective punishment measures must stop.

We agree with the view that it is essential to provide assistance to Syria's neighbours, which have taken in millions of refugees. However, we also believe that this is, after all, a temporary situation and that expending significant funds to establish refugees in their host countries is ill-advised. Of course, schools for Syrian children in Turkey and Jordan can be built, but surely it would be better to help restore the education system in Syria itself.

We are deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Raqqa. Tens of thousands of people have been under siege for months, civilian targets are being regularly bombed and hit by heavy artillery and there are no humanitarian corridors. And yet for unknown reasons, the United Nations has still not included this emergency zone on its list of besieged areas. In our view, it should be a matter of no less concern to the United Nations than the issues that the Emergency Coordinator brought up today. In general, we would like to advise the Under-Secretary-General to base his assessments on verified information, as we have already said several times. We trust that his future visit to Syria will enable him to better understand the humanitarian situation in the country.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura and Mr. Mark Lowcock for their briefings and to take a moment to welcome Mr. Lowcock to the Security Council. His dedication to addressing the humanitarian crisis in Syria is inspiring. I would be grateful if at some point he could tell us if the Syrian regime has given him a visa yet.

Last week's high-level meeting to address humanitarian needs in Syria was very productive. We thank the European Union for convening it to focus attention on the ongoing crisis that has resulted from the Syrian conflict. The United States was able to announce $697 million in new humanitarian assistance for victims and the host communities that support Syrian refugees. Other nations also made much-needed commitments.

Although there has been some lessening of violence in Syria, this is no time to become complacent. If the Syrian people do not see a political process working in parallel with our de-escalation efforts, the violence will resume. Any gains against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) will only be temporary. Any agreements on paper in Astana will not succeed. The

Syrian people will remain vulnerable and at odds with each other without a political process in which they and the regime can participate in good faith.

Yet, the Syrian regime refuses to come to the table in good faith. Instead, the regime continues to deny humanitarian access to those in need. Monthly United Nations operation plans, including this month's, have been met with "constraints". No cross-line convoys have been able to move in recent weeks, despite having received approval from the Syrian Government at the outset. As the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has reported, the Syrian Arab Armed Forces continue to use chemical weapons against civilians and target hospitals and medical personnel.

Just last week, there were reports of airstrikes in Idlib and northern Hama provinces. The strikes killed at least three medical personnel and damaged a number of medical facilities and civil defence centres. Just yesterday, there were reports of an alleged regime attack on a centre for the disabled in Modira. That attack, if true, is reprehensible. The attacks fit an all-too-familiar pattern in which medical facilities and personnel, as well as the civilians they serve, are victims of strikes by the Syrian regime and its Russian allies. The Russians claim to have leverage over the Syrian regime. They claim to want to expand humanitarian assistance to certain areas, but it is their ally Al-Assad who is denying humanitarian assistance to many people in need in an ugly new low, even for Al-Assad. His regime is authorizing humanitarian convoys to his supporters while preventing life-saving aid from reaching other Syrians. We take our Russian friends at their word when they say that they will resolve those humanitarian problems if they are going to continue to partner with Iran and Al-Assad.

The United States is committed to finding a solution in Syria. We must increase humanitarian access to besieged and suffering communities. We must hold the regime accountable for denying assistance. But the only lasting solution in Syria and the only way to end the violence and defeat terrorism is through a political transition that does not allow Iranian influence to replace ISIS or Al-Assad in power. If the civil war continues, more people will suffer and our gains against ISIS will only open a door to other extremists seeking to exploit the conflict. All of those who have answered the call of human tragedy in Syria have our thanks and our respect, but we must not and we will not forget what is needed in order to truly solve the crisis: a real political process through which the Syrian people gain the ability to ensure their own safety and determine their own future.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): At the outset, let me congratulate Mr. Lowcock on his first briefing to the Security Council on Syria. He brings more than 30 years of experience to the position, having led and managed responses to humanitarian crises across the globe, and wise strategic leadership in the area of international development.

We are also grateful to the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. De Mistura, for his insightful update. We commend him for his exceptional commitment and determination to pursue peace in Syria, and welcome his multifaceted diplomacy to resolve the crisis.

Kazakhstan remains committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and to the continuity of State institutions. We note gradual progress on the political front during the Geneva and Astana meetings, and draw attention to the reduced military activity and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in the four de-escalation zones. Astana reaffirms its readiness to further the political process to achieve peace and stability in Syria. I want to underline that the Astana platform complements the Geneva platform and is not intended to replace it.

In searching for an exit strategy, an original approach should be considered as a very effective method to mitigate the situation and prevent further deterioration. Therefore, Kazakhstan calls on all Middle Eastern and Gulf States to join the guarantor countries in ensuring that the ceasefire regime is respected and observed by all parties. If we hope to see further progress, it is important to continue supporting the objectives and gains of the Astana and Geneva negotiations and of the three guarantors.

The humanitarian situation is grave and deserves our attention. Kazakhstan highly appreciates the activities of the humanitarian personnel of the United Nations stationed in Syria, namely, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organization and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARC) . We call on the Syrian Government and neighbouring countries not to impede the access of humanitarian assistance to refugee camps, and we urge Syria to open humanitarian corridors to the besieged areas.

Following a comprehensive review by the United Nations, we were pleased to learn that Deir ez-Zor and 93,500 people in city are being removed from the list of those besieged. However, 419,920 people remain besieged in 10 locations across Syria. We are encouraged by the fact that United Nations humanitarian personnel, OCHA, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the World Food Programme will deliver humanitarian aid to Deir ez-Zor for the first time since earlier this month.

The safe withdrawal of civilians from war zones and their protection should be the priority of all operations. We support the visit by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock to Syria in the near future to see the situation on the ground for himself. The parties to the conflict and the countries supporting them should agree on the release of hostages, the transfer of the dead and the exchange of information on missing persons.

Finally, the Security Council must fulfil its statutory duties by taking more effective and collaborative measures to resolve the Syrian crisis as soon as possible.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and on success in leading the deliberations of the Council.

Having listened to the statements made by our colleagues just now, I cannot help but compare them. The comparison indicates that some of our colleagues know what they are talking about and what is happening in Syria by virtue of being politically involved on the ground and following developments in the situation in Syria. Meanwhile, others who have spoken have no experience on the ground and do not know what is happening in Syria. They base their statements primarily on fabrications of the media and information based on intelligence, which present an image of events in Syria that is unrelated to counter-terrorism and depicts a humanitarian crisis that has been caused solely by the Syrian Government. As I begin my statement, that comparison is very important to keep in mind, so that some colleagues can be made aware that seven years into the terrorist war imposed on my country, it is time to abandon posturing, lies and misleading.

I listened very carefully to the briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock. I wish him success in implementing his noble mission as the head of the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I assure him that we are most willing to cooperate with any sincere effort to address the humanitarian situation in my country, as long as the purpose is to help the Syrian people without seeking to exploit their pain for interventionist agendas.

Since the beginning of the terrorist war against my country, the Syrian Government has continued to cooperate with the United Nations and its various agencies to deliver humanitarian assistance to the people who need it, based on the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance, in particular General Assembly resolution 46/182. The main such principle is the need to respect Syrian sovereignty, which has been upheld by all Security Council resolutions on Syria. While the issue of sovereignty is extremely important, some forget to mention it. With all respect, I say to my colleague Mr. Lowcock that he committed that sine today by not mentioning cooperation with the Syrian Government at all in his briefing, as if the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) were cooperating with ghosts in Syria and not with the Government.

Following the issuance of the forty-third report (S/2017/794) of the Secretary-General on the humanitarian situation in Syria, we believe that now is the time to move from a state of denial to recognition that the root cause of the crisis in my country is the emergence and proliferation of armed terrorist groups, at the forefront of which are Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and their affiliated groups. Those groups are summoning tens of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters, who are supported from abroad. They are spreading throughout neighbourhoods and villages in Syria, using civilians as human shields and promoting barbaric ideologies. That has been borne out by the report (see S/2015/358) of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team established pursuant to resolution 1526 (2004).

In blatant violation of international law, some States have also imposed unilateral arbitrary economic measures against the Syrian people, which has led to hardship in living conditions and an exacerbation of Syrians' suffering in all areas — economic, social, humanitarian and health. My colleague the Ambassador of the United States has just said that her Government has allocated $860 million for Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Would it not have been better to

use that money to help the refugees to return to their home country of Syria — to rebuild schools, hospitals and roads — instead of pressing to keep them outside Syrian territory?

A few days ago, we met with Mr. Lowcock and we very clearly conveyed to him the Syrian Government's concerns with, and observations on, OCHA's recent performance. We did so based on our hope of building a transparent, professional and objective relationship that leads to achieving our common objectives, that is, to help the Syrian people meet their needs, to provide assistance to everyone who needs it and to rehabilitate infrastructure so that refugees and displaced persons may return to their homes once security and stability have been restored throught the efforts of Syria and its allied countries and friends.

First, the relationship that we hope to achieve with the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies is a lawful relationship that respects the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance. Second, it is an ethical relationship based on the non-politicization and non-exploitation of the humanitarian situation to exert pressure on the Syrian Government. Third, it is a relationship of partnership and cooperation that recognizes the efforts of the Syrian Government to deliver assistance and to overcome the barriers that obstruct assistance delivery. Fourth, it is a realistic relationship that recognizes that the real reason behind Syrian suffering is international terrorism, in addition to the unilateral and arbitrary collective economic measures imposed by the United States, the European Union and other countries against the Syrian people. Fifth, it is a credible relationship that recognizes that the illegal actions of the so-called international coalition are increasing the suffering of Syrians through killing thousands of civilians and destroying infrastructure. Sixth, it is a credible relationship that recognizes that dubious sources and sources linked to terrorist organizations cannot be relied upon in assessing the humanitarian situation in Syria. And it is a relationship that rejects treating Syrian pain as a commodity, recognizes that donor conferences are just for show, and rejects the exploitation of this humanitarian situation by donor countries to implement their political agendas, and calls upon them to fulfil their commitments. The proportion of pledged assistance is yet to exceed 33 per cent. It is also a relationship that acknowledges that the linking by some countries of financing for the humanitarian response with political conditions contradicts with rules and principles of humanitarian work and undermines the role of the United Nations in this domain.

Two years ago, I drew the attention of the Council to an aerial strike by the so-called international coalition — and I mean by that American aircraft — on a school for disabled chidren in Raqqa, killing dozens of them. And now I hear my female colleague levelling accusations that the Syrian Air Force attacked a school for students with special needs in the same area. The relationship I am talking about must not only aim to alleviate the suffering or any form of blackmailing, but must also be based on trust, partnership, cooperation, dialogue, professionalism and credibility — not on the basis of imposing conditions that violate Syrian sovereignty.

Since the beginning of the so-called crisis, the Syrian Government has spared no effort in being involved in sincere efforts to improve access to humanitarian assistance. As an example, my country recently accepted and approved the Resident Coordinator's proposal to establish a mechanism that includes the Syrian Government, the Russian Federation and the United Nations to promote coordination among humanitarian actors active in Syria, as part of the humanitarian response plan and the plans for joint convoys. We also agreed to review and implement measures to deliver assistance to the de-escalated areas. That mechanism held its first meeting in Damascus on 19 September.

The Syrian Government stresses the importance that humanitarian assistance not be limited to destabilized areas; they must also reach areas liberated by the Syrian Arab Army and its allied and friendly forces, particularly in Deir ez-Zor, eastern Aleppo and other places. We very much appreciate the important assistance provided by the Government of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some want to fight Russia in Syria, Iran in Syria, and our allied forces in Syria.

I also listened carefully to the briefing by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura. I would like to point out that, speaking in the general debate at the General Assembly a few days ago (see A/72/PV.19), Syria's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs stated that the policy of the Syrian State since the beginning of the terrorist war imposed on us has been based on two major pillars, namely, counter terrorism and working diligently and

consistently to achieve a political solution that ends the bloodshed and restores stability, in continuation of the national reconciliation process that has proven successful, having allowed thousands of displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes. To a great extent, that has contributed to improving the living conditions of large numbers of Syrians, who have suffered too much from terrorist crimes.

My country's Government has demonstrated a serious commitment to the Astana and Geneva paths. We have attended seven rounds in Astana and seven rounds in Geneva. And yet some still say that the Syrian Government is not serious about its enegagement in the political process. What the hell were we doing in each of those seven rounds? My country views positively the Astana path and the resulting identification of de-escalated areas, in the hope that we will reach a real end to hostilities, including separating terrorist groups such as Da'esh, Al-Nusra and others from those groups that have agreed to join the Astana path. What is wrong about that? Is it not compatible with the Security Council resolutions?

In the same vein, my country's Government reaffirms its commitment to the Geneva process and seeks to advance it. The Syrian Arab Republic delegation participated in every round of the Geneva talks, seriously and responsibly. We recently had a very useful round with the Special Envoy and his team, where we focused on two main topics: combating terrorism and meetings between constitutional law experts.

In conclusion, my country's Government reiterates that it will continue to relentlessly combat international terrorism across the entirety of the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic — I repeat, all of its territory. We stress our long-standing position that the solution to the crisis in Syria is a political one based on intra-Syrian dialogue, under Syrian leadership and without external intervention or preconditions.

The President: The representative of the United States of America has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I want to respond to a couple of points that have been made so that we set the record straight.

Russia's assertion that we should see an end to the cross-border assistance due to gains made in access is false. Mr. Lowcock just briefed the Council that in August the United Nations was able to reach only 280,500 people with inter-agency convoys — out of the 1.3 million requested. That is only 21 per cent. Meanwhile, the United Nations reaches more than 1 million people cross-border each month. Those are 1 million people who would be left without anything if we ceased cross-border aid. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime continues to remove medical items from convoys and artificially reduces the beneficiary numbers. Those actions are not demonstrations of goodwill from the Government, nor are they a Government we can trust. Now is not the time to reduce our tools to reach people in need. Syrians have suffered for nearly seven years. In short, cross-border assistance must continue in order to save millions of people from death and destruction.

I would also like to say that so many of us want to see an end to the Syrian crisis. We have all watched too many people suffer, we have all met in the Security Council too many times to discuss the situation. But I would like to explain to our Syrian counterpart that the refugees did not leave Syria just because of terrorists. I went there to speak to refugees in Jordan. I spoke to refugees in Turkey. And all of them, whether they were in a camp or not, said that their bigger fear was the regime. The reason they left Syria was out of fear of terrorism, but also out of fear of their very own Government.

Mr. Ja'afari was talking about aid. It is actually $697 million that is going to host countries. We are giving that money to host countries because we know they take care of their people. We have seen proof that they take care of their people. We would like to give that money to Syria. We would like to give that money to its Government — if we can see proof that it is taking care of its own people. Trust has to be earned. It has to be taken based on good faith and goodwill. We have not seen that. We are not giving up on seeing that, but there is no way that he can come to the Council and talk about the fact that anyone is doing anything politically in the situation. The truth of the matter is that the only political thing we all want is for Syrians to be able to go home and live under a Government that takes care of its own people. He must give us proof that they are doing good by their people. Give us proof that Syrians are better off for being back in Syria, and not in Turkey or Jordan — because right now they are better taken care of in Jordan and Turkey than they have ever been in Syria. They deserve to go home. They deserve to

feel safe. And they deserve to be in a place where the Government takes care of them.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I do not intend to engage in polemics, but we need to get to the bottom of the statistics with regard to the number of people in Syria who have access to humanitarian assistance and people who have received assistance from the United Nations. I think that this is one of the challenges that the new Under-Secretary-General will have to deal with. I remember the last time we discussed the matter of Syria and humanitarian access in the Consultations Room with a representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), who provided us with compelling data on the number of people receiving humanitarian assistance. Thanks to assistance provided by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic — unless I am mistaken — it is not hundreds of thousands, but 5 million people who received assistance thanks to OCHA cooperation with the Syrian Government. I do not wish to dispute the figures, but I would like us to get to the bottom of the statistics. I would ask that Mr. Lowcock address this matter. Let us, so to speak, synchronize our watches on this issue.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for requesting the floor once again.

First, a scandal concerning WikiLeaks documents has revealed the intentions of the United States Government to overthrow the regime in my country since 2006. The WikiLeaks documents have been published in the United States, and the book is available on Amazon for whoever wants to acquire it.

Second, in her memoir, Hillary Clinton confesses that it was the United States Administration that created Da'esh, Al-Nusra, Al-Qaida and others. Many books written in the United States and Europe have all pointed to the manipulation of Islamic political terrorism, particularly to undermine Governments in our Arab and Middle Eastern region.

Third, have we forgotten about what happened in Iraq? Can we forget the scandal of the invasion of Iraq and all the resulting afflictions in our region and in that country?

Fourth, who asked and permitted the so-called international coalition forces to enter my country, and what is the United States military doing in parts of the national territory of Syria? Is there any justification for that? How can the sovereignty of my country be militarily violated in many areas, in a blatant and extreme violation of international law? What are American forces doing on our land and who asked them to come?

Fifth, why has the United States Pentagon run an operations room in Amman since the beginning of the crisis in my country? Is it not to train terrorists and send them across the border to my country?

Sixth, have we forgotten that the former United States Administration spent $500 million to train a mere 39 terrorists to liberate Syria from its ruling regime? Ultimately, those 39 terrorists joined Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front with their American weapons.

Seventh, who attacked the Syrian Army position in Jabal Thurdah, in Deir ez-Zor, on 17 September a year ago? Was it not the United States Air Force that attacked the Syrian Arab Army position in Deir ez-Zor that was protecting 300,000 civilians there from Da'esh? What was the result? The American attack on the Syrian Arab Army position in Jabal Thurdah allowed Da'esh to seize the position and attack Deir ez-Zor for an entire year. This happened again recently.

On 21 September, the Syrian Defence Ministry and the Russian Defence Ministry announced that Deir ez-Zor would be liberated from Da'esh within a week and that our army was at the gates of that city. The Russian and Syrian air forces have eliminated 850 Da'esh terrorists in Deir ez-Zor. The terrorists have withdawn and the Syrian Arab Army has regained control of Deir ez-Zor and the surrounding areas. It is easy to imagine what happened next. The international coalition, led by the United States, ceased its operations in Raqqa, which is the stronghold of Da'esh, and pushed the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, which it supports, to Deir ez-Zor, which our army was liberating. It is almost as if the Americans were racing the Syrian Army to reach Deir ez-Zor instead of fighting Da'esh in Raqqa.

There were, of course, aerial images captured by our ally and friend, the Russians. These satellite images reveal American troops and the Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant forces exchanging locations without fighting. Helicopters transported Da'esh leaders to some unknown location.

What I want to say is that the American and European conduct now and their attitude towards what is taking place in my country goes against all resolutions that the Security Council has adopted since the beginning of the crisis in Syria on the political situation in my country and on counter-terrorism.

The United States Government must be made aware of and understand that we are a sovereign State, just like the United States itself. We have no desire to fight the United States, but we want the United States to change its erroneous policies towards my country. What benefit is there to Syrians if millions of us remain outside the country? My colleague said that the Syrians have fled the practices of the Syrian Government, and I now say before everyone that the Syrian Government wants the host countries to return the refugees to our country. If millions of Syrians are to return with dignity, we must lift the coercive unilateral sanctions so that those millions can find work opportunities, manufacturing facilities and a dignified life, instead of keeping them in neighbouring States.

As we have said before, the Syrian Government is being blackmailed. Either it must make concessions, or the situation of refugees and the so-called moderate opposition — which is genetically modified, as we told Mr. De Mistura — will continue. It is blatant blackmail. That is not how political solutions work; they must be based on our assistance as a Government, and not work against us as a Government and exploit the humanitarian situation to exert pressure on us.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.